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ABSTRACT

It is argued that what is proposed currently as multicultural education is little more than a series of superficial nods to subordinate groups that often celebrate deficits and disguise the legacy of colonialism, and that a pedagogy of critical analysis of the inequities inherent in such a system is more appropriate. A critical, holistic approach to education is seen as offering a powerful challenge to selectively reproduced cultural politics and provides a way to deconstruct domination, distinction, and dualism, and reconstruct schools and society. Multiculturalism, it is proposed, has been diminished by being relegated to a "type" of curriculum, even in higher education. It unwittingly renders the culture of the dominant group invisible while isolating "others" and treating them as undifferentiated masses by focusing on similarities rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue about difference, artificially separating ethnicity from the integrated whole of a person. A critical pedagogy must challenge the assumptions on which the dominant curriculum is based. Critical pedagogy encourages interpretation of different perspectives in their historical, cultural, and political contexts. The educator's role then becomes one of enabling students to develop their own sensibilities and to support those positions by reason. Contains 35 references. (MSE)

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What's in a name?
An argument against "multicultural" education

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FLORIDA?

INTRODUCTION

Education has become a battleground for cultural supremacy parading under a banner of inclusion and tolerance that serves to hide insidious problems of social justice, power, and racism. The fact that we distinguish "multicultural education" as a particular "sub"-genre of education speaks directly to many of the problems inherent in such labeling (Goffman, 1974; Derrida, 1981; Spina, 1996). It leads to diversity-for-inequality, ensuring the marginalization of such studies by reducing multiculturalism (and thereby its importance) to an isolated, "subject" appended to the core curricula of schools. This reflects the widespread belief that multicultural education is only for students from "other" than the dominant group. Even at the university level, "Caribbean Studies Centers," "Black History Institutes," and other "Ethnic" programs that exist are physically and ideologically located at the periphery of the institutions. The positioning and content of these courses generally neutralizes conflict and fosters an ethnocentric romanticized embracing of culture that glorifies individualism, trivializes history, and depreciates the significance of struggle. As Peter McLaren (1994, p. 31) so clearly summarizes:

> Diversity that somehow constitutes itself as a harmonious ensemble of benign cultural spheres is a conservative and liberal model of multiculturalism that, in my mind, deserves to be jettisoned because, when we try to make culture an undisturbed space of harmony and agreement where social relations exist within cultural forms of uninterrupted accords we subscribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories that are played out in the field of social antagonisms.

This paper attempts to shift the focus of education from superficial nods to subordinate groups which often celebrate deficits and disguise the legacy of colonialism, to a pedagogy of critical analyses of the inequities inherent in such a system. It argues that a critical, holistic approach to education offers a powerful challenge to selectively re-produced cultural politics and provides a way to

deconstruct domination and essentialism; distinction and dualism — and thereby to re-construct (i.e. democratize) schools and society. It argues that multiculturalism has been diminished by being relegated to a "type" of curriculum in the realm of schooling.

Multiculturalism is about more than schooling. It is about life — about who we are and about every aspect of our interactions with each other and the world. Contrary to general belief, we are all "cultural" beings. Multiculturalism unwittingly renders the culture of the dominant group invisible, while isolating "others" and treating them as undifferentiated masses by focusing on similarities at the expense of engaging in meaningful dialogue about difference. "Multicultural" education artificially separates ethnicity from the integrated whole of a person. Just as when you separate hydrogen and oxygen from a water molecule, neither one captures the quality of water, the conventional concentration on certain isolated aspects of culture — be it food, holidays, national dress, whatever —does not capture the whole.

A critical pedagogy must challenge the very assumptions on which the dominant curriculum is based. It must be emancipatory and empowering — a pedagogy of action that not only transforms consciousness but changes lives. It must reach beyond schools to families and communities, advocating and working towards social justice. As Bartolomé (1996, p. 233) argues, pedagogy should "speak to the day to day reality, struggles, concerns, and dreams of [our] students." This requires attending to the unique sociocultural context of each situation. It requires that we, as teachers, move beyond complicity in perpetuating the status quo through complacent replication of whatever methodological recipes are currently in favor.

For example, contrary to popular practice, having a class celebration day in "honor" of Puerto Ricans being "granted" U. S. citizenship in 1917, is not multicultural education. Similarly, substituting "politically correct" information for

what students may already "know" by telling students that Puerto Ricans do not consider citizenship to have been "granted" to them but rather "imposed" on them involuntarily, is not critical pedagogy (Nieto, 1996). It only becomes a critical pedagogy through an analysis and interpretation of different perspectives embedded in their time and place, which provides a basis for understanding and action.

According to Freire (1985), critical pedagogy encourages students to question, seek their own meaning, and to recognize their right and responsibility to take action. Critical pedagogy values diversity and fosters critical thinking and reflection, thereby informing and enabling agency. It provides a critical hermeneutic and historical epistemology (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1996) that enables a meta-awareness of the social, historical, cultural, and political dynamics of education. Underlying critical pedagogy is the assumption that the purpose of learning is to be able to understand the meaning of something. The curriculum in American schools emphasizes received knowledge over creativity and critical thinking. Knowledge, however, is not the same as understanding. The nature of understanding, as Shank explains, "is different than the nature of knowing, because understanding deals with meaning and knowing deals with empirical truth" (1992, p. 201). As Kincheloe and Steinberg said, "the way we define thinking exerts a profound impact on the nature of our schools, the role that teachers play in the world, and the shape that society will ultimately take" (1996, p. 174). One problem with the current positivist paradigm of education (which makes claims to objectivity and therefore sees knowledge as neutral and universal) is that it equates knowing the "truth" with understanding its meaning. When we consider the world as subjective interpretation, not a compendium of facts, we go beyond accepting the passive receipt of "knowledge" to the construction of meaning — to understanding what physicist David Bohm calls the deep structures underlying "the tacit forces, the

hidden assumptions that shape perceptions of the world" (In Kincheloe and Steinberg, p. 179).

A second assumption is that critical pedagogy encompasses and expands multiculturalism, feminism, humanism, anti-racism, and a host of other "isms" through its embodiment of critical theory. Unlike these "isms," however, a critical approach enables us to go beyond the bifurcations and fragmentation often inherent in such stances. It provides a more integrated and synthetic framework that directs our attention to the complexity and interrelations among categorizations and dynamics and to expose the subtleties of their exclusionary reductionism.

Thirdly, since ideology is embedded in language, issues related to language are central to critical pedagogy. Language, as used here, includes both voice and silence. That distinction is important because this is not always the case. Inclusion of a group's language can mask the exclusion of their voice, as often happens in bilingual and ESL programs. The fundamental goal of these programs is to mainstream students into English-only classrooms as quickly as possible. They generally emphasize vocabulary and the mechanics of language at the expense of content, creativity, and critical thinking while stripping away the language the student brings with her by negating its value and situating it as inferior to English. By severely limiting these programs in number, scope, and length, languages other than English are further delegitimized and their speakers blatantly devalued and subjugated. Language is closely tied to personal identity (Snow, 1992) and forced assimilation into the dominant tongue dehumanizes and delimits. A critical approach to language interpretation exposes these dynamics of sound and silence, imagery and power, contradiction and politics.

Schools have long been considered the predominant way our society perpetuates the preferred ideologies and social inequities that propagate cultural domination (Bowles and Gintis, 1976; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977). Yet, it is a

narrow view that conceives of education as solely the purview of schools, especially as mass-media plays an ever increasing role in the representation and production of culture. A critical perspective enables one to deconstruct media and message and thereby resist the machinery of both explicit and implicit manipulation. This is particularly important in a consumer culture that bombards us with overt and covert forms of persuasion and pressures us toward obsessive conformity embedded in deranged obsolescence — a culture in which electronic media are forcing the redefinition of self and other and how we communicate and interact with each other (See Giroux, 1996b) by profoundly restructuring the way information is created, disseminated and circulated within the culture — as well as who has access to it.

Because we live in a technological, post-modern, multicultural society, we are inevitably faced with multiple ideologies comprised of many discourses (Macedo, 1996). Thus, it is imperative that we acquire many literacies (Gee, 1992) — a critical and coherent comprehension of the complex whole, not just an isolated part. We must develop a critical understanding of psychological entities such as "memories, beliefs, values, meanings, and so forth...which are actually out in the social world of action and interaction" (Freire and Macedo, 1987, p. 131).

By expanding the search for alternative modes of structuring reality, critical pedagogy provides a vehicle of communication and hope that offers a way to transform schooling; to create the space within which multi-discoursed communication can take place; to open the way for interdisciplinary aesthetics, and noncanonical literature and art; to embrace the fluid, often contradictory features of experience that resist crystallization in language; to recognize the multiplicity of selves and meanings in context and over time in an intimate, nonjudgmental, and dialogic manner.

CURRICULAR IMPLICATIONS

A critical pedagogy recognizes education as a dynamic and critical process — not the static entity that canned curriculum and dogmatic management techniques of promote. The de-intellectualizing of teachers by teacher education programs undermines their ability for critical engagement and independent authority. Teachers are further disempowered by institutional practices of isolating them from each other and the opportunity for reflection and dialogue, and contact with the larger community.

As early as 1890, Horace Willard, a New England teacher, argued that teachers, in comparison to other professionals, lived "lives of mechanical routine, and were subjected to a machine of supervision, organization, classification, grading, percentages, uniformity, promotion, tests, examination...[with no room for] individuality, ideas, independence, originality, study, investigation" (Powell, 1976, in Giroux and McLaren, 1996, p. 301). These sentiments were echoed forty years later by Henry Holmes, the dean of the newly formed Graduate School of Education at Harvard University, in his critique of the 1930 National Survey of the Education of Teachers. He bemoaned the survey's view of teachers as "routine worker[s] under the expert direction of principals, supervisors, and superintendents that virtually undermined the development of teachers as critically-minded intellectuals" (Powell, 1976, in Giroux and McLaren, 1996, p. 302).

Liberatory praxis, on the other hand, creates a pedagogy predicated in a politics of the possible, emphasizing teaching as meaning-making, not mastering a set of techniques. In traditional schooling, teaching frequently means slavishly enforcing lesson plans developed by curriculum writers with no relationship to the social contexts — to the lives — of the students. The origins of the "knowledge" and its underlying ideology are not questioned. The role of social forces in the reproduction and privileging of the dominant culture remain invisible. The

propagation of specific instructional methods reinforce the notion of teaching as technical — as "scientific." But teachers' adherence to "instructions for instruction" yields preconceived results. To go beyond prescription, mechanistic views of instruction need to shift to a critical view that considers the socio-political dimensions of education (Bartolomé, 1996) — to a pedagogy that is responsive to the needs of students instead of prescribed teaching methods and materials which are restrictive to students and exploitive of teachers, showing a lack of trust in their judgments and undermining their professionalism (Carlson, 1996).

Unlike prescribed pedagogical practices of the positivist paradigm, there are many ways to "do" critical pedagogy. There is not one way — one methodology — that can be transferred effectively across classrooms. A methodology implies an ideology. The richer the ideology, the more diverse the methods. A critical pedagogy represents aspects of a dynamic situation and cannot be captured in frozen criteria or precise formulae. Such an approach to education focuses on how codes of meaning operate, both explicitly and implicitly, to help students determine how to construct their own understanding. It de-centers anglocentric values and resituates education in its ideological and historical context, opening the way for democratic and liberatory education grounded in the lived experience of the participants. This cannot be accomplished by simply adding or integrating content about ethnicity, women, or other marginalized groups to existing curriculum.

Reading a sentimentalized story about Squanto at Thanksgiving is not multiculturalism. It is tokenism and it is demeaning, insulting, and, unfortunately, all too typical. It doesn't speak against domination but serves to further reinforce the myths of colonialism by glossing over the impact of Whites on Native American culture and presenting these groups as mutually benevolent and cooperative. This, in fact, promotes racism by functioning to dissolve cultural differences and distort history.

Similarly, the meaning of celebrations such as Cinco de Mayo have been lost through an emphasis on food and artifacts without reference to the events they commemorate. Cinco de Mayo celebrates Mexican resistance to cultural invasion, yet, in the name of "multicultural education," it is stripped of its political implications. Likewise, Martin Luther King Jr. Day has been reduced to a holiday about "dreams" without reference to the nightmares of racism. "I have a dream." One out-of-context phrase from one speech by a dynamic African American leader has become a slogan for trivializing the struggle and vision of an entire people.

In literature, a book such as The Bluest Eye may be added to the existing canon of works by Melville, Twain, Shakespeare, Hawthorn, Faulkner, and other proponents of the dominant culture. However, like ethnic holidays, it remains an addendum -- an "extra." The message is that it is "less important," "inferior," "dispensable." Furthermore, substantive issues of race, class, gender, and politics are not discussed whether the author is Twain, Steinbeck, or Morrison; whether the celebration is Cinco de Mayo, Columbus Day, or Kwaanza.

For example, although there is substantial evidence that collaborative learning models are effective (Brown, Collins, and Newman, 1989; Forman and McPhail, 1989; McGroarty, 1989), many students find collaborative work, especially models that use the novice-expert matrix, as simply another way to re-present power. We need to problematize such models while also exploring why we assume the superiority of more egalitarian learning relationships. Power needs to be made visible. The power of the teacher goes beyond expertise. This does not mean that the teacher should deny this power, but rather that she should actively problematize it and use it to increase the power of others.

Similarly, reading must not be "a submission to the authority of the text" (Giroux and McLaren, 1992b, p. 19). Reading a text, whether verbal, visual, or in some other form, must become a dialectical process whereby one engages with the

text from a critical, interpretive standpoint that exposes the spoken and unspoken semiotics of such discourses. Texts should represent a variety of perspectives from a variety of disciplines.

Critical pedagogy is, then, interdisciplinary and provides a strong basis for interdisciplinary studies by encouraging students to employ a broad range of skills and studies to add support to their interpretations and substance to their understanding. Many ways of knowing are equally valid. By learning to think in terms of a critical stance we become less willing to accept observations as facts but become aware of the underlying assumptions that contribute to interpretation.

Our immersion in the ubiquitous media imagery of daily life — from the continuous assault of up to 231 advertisements[1] during our average daily exposure to seven hours of television (Gerbner, 1993) to the barrage of more subtle forms of persuasion (such as the use of music by businesses to enhance productivity and product positioning by stores to increase purchases) that permeate our environment — demands an ability to critically resist the power of falsehoods paraded as facts. Critical pedagogy is one of the few models to encompass media and to empower students to address the proliferation of "hegemonically scripted photographic and electronically produced images and sounds [which serve] as a form of multi-media catechism through which individuals ritually encode and evaluate the engagements they make in the various discursive contexts of everyday life" (Giroux and McLaren, 1992a, p. 219).

Perhaps no one has as much influence in this sphere as the Disney empire (See Giroux, 1996a). While representative of media-wide depictions of dominant-eye views of gender, class, race, and agency, Disney's animated films are particularly seductive because of their outstanding technical skills, their enchantment as entertainment, their aura of innocence, and their huge success and popularity, which induce popular audiences to suspend critical judgment. For example, in a

Disneyesque attempt at multicultural awareness, the seemingly innocuous film "Aladdin," based on stories of Arabian culture, was released in 1992. Yet, the moment we hear the lyrics of the opening song: "Oh I come from a land/ From a faraway place / Where the caravan camels roam. / Where they cut off your ear / If they don't like your face. / It's barbaric, but hey, it's home," we are subject to racist representations that magnify "popular stereotypes already primed by the media through its portrayal of the Gulf War" (Giroux, 1996a, p. 105). This racism is further promoted by a cast of grotesque sword-wielding supporting characters with heavy accents, sinister eyes, beards, and bulbous noses (Salem, in Giroux, 1996a, p. 105). On the other hand, Aladdin and Jasmine, the "good" main characters, have westernized features and speak standard American English. The characters are involved in larger narratives about freedom, class, gender-roles, power, and similar themes. But, as Henry Giroux (1996a, p. 100) says:

> This should not suggest that the role of the critic in dealing with Disney's animated films is to simply assign them a particular ideological reading. On the contrary, the challenge of such films is to analyze the various themes and assumptions that inform them both within and outside of the dominant institutional and ideological formations that attempt to constrain how they might be taken up. This allows educators and others to try to understand how such films can become sites of contestation, translation, and exchange in order to be read differently.

It is no secret that Disney is one of the biggest promoters of commercial tie-ins which widen its influence on our cultural landscape and aggrandizes commodification as a defining principle of our culture. Aladdin merchandising alone earned the Disney corporation over $1 billion. Their market mechanisms manipulate memories by filtering out the complexities and struggles of the real world and foster consumption of a nostalgic ideology that cloaks national and personal identity in selective, homogeneous cultural narratives that white-wash (pun intended) history. The pleasures of myth shape our experience through a

range of products from breakfast cereals to pristine theme parks built around "Main Streets" that portray a world "without tenements or poverty or urban class conflict...a native white Protestant dream of a world without blacks or immigrants" (Weiner, in Giroux, p. 95). Critical interpretation of media can provide students with tools to discriminate between such persuasive pictures and prepackaged values; the systematization of domination and exploitation; and the institutionalization of practices such as tracking, sexism, racism, homophobia, and monolingualism.

"Multicultural" approaches to education often ignore issues of multilingualism as well as the growing body of research that points to the cognitive advantages of true bilingualism (Kessler and Quinn, 1980; Hakuta, 1986; Cummins, 1988; Flores, Cousin, and Diaz, 1991). Instead, bilingualism is viewed as a transition to assimilation into English. In many schools, students whose first language is not English are in the majority. Yet, as Macedo says "one cannot celebrate the different cultural values through the very dominant language that devalues, in many ways, the cultural experience of different cultural groups" (1994, p. 124). He calls this, aptly, the "tongue-tying of America." Monolingualism serves to perpetuate social control over subordinate language groups while ignoring the political, psychological, and pedagogical implications of this approach. Through critical pedagogy, these hidden agendas become exposed as a site of power and resistance. Bilingual and ESL programs are often no better. Many are based on deficit models instead of the notion of a democratic and liberatory education. (A deficit model assumes that variations from mainstream skills and values are deficit-producing aberrations which must be subject to compensatory interventions.) They frequently emphasize syntax and vocabulary, aiming at developing English language skills at the expense of meaningful learning, development of self-concept, and socio-cultural identity. As Macedo (1994, p. 125-126) says

> ...the present overdose of monolingualism and Anglocentrism that dominates the current educational debate not only contributes to a type of mind-tied America, but also prevents the development of educators and leaders who can rethink what it means to prepare students to enter the ever-changing, multilingual, multicultural world of the 21st century.

In the words of Pease-Alvarez and Hakuta (1993, p. 105), "these bilingual individuals represent the best hope this nation has of developing competencies in languages other than English." We must engage in dialogue around these and related issues as symbolic acts that perpetuate differential learning and disempowerment. We must actively advocate against current isolationist forms of domination toward a globally integrated policy of education, politics, and economics.

CONCLUSION

A critical approach to education can help students and teachers to deconstruct the reproduction of class, politicize the ideology of colonialism, and overcome the inequities they engender. By moving outside the hegemonic limits of logical positivism, critical pedagogy stretches the boundary between the expressed and unexpressed toward the possibility of additional dimensions of understanding as a result of the hermeneutic grasping of what Wittgenstein (1965) called these "new forms of life." The recognition of this opens the way for [critical] interpretation and the relationality of value, provoking discovery and vitality, substance and transformation, in a field dominated too long by dead white males.

The educator's role, then, becomes one of enabling students to develop their own sensibilities, whatever they may be, and to support those positions by reasons. This explicatory process does not simply reinforce student views but scaffolds them to clarification through a striving for critical awareness, with standards that are not imposed from the outside but arrived at from within, recognizing a multiplicity of reasons for interpretation. It is important to understand how our own subjectivity

privileges certain views and to actively render visible (with the goal of transforming) the partiality of our own perspective; to talk about what is being done and why; to identify and problematize not only the material being covered, but also the classroom events and interactions; to actively engage with resistance and discomfort; to provide experience with the construction of understanding; to foster an appreciation for multiple perspectives without demanding uncritical acceptance; to encourage ownership and voice in the learning process; to provide authentic learning experiences; to address a range of learning styles and preferences for alternate modes of representation — Not just to accept and reinforce diversity or pluralism but to aid in the student's development of a critical stance toward the bases for meaning and significance, difference and relativity, connections and boundary-breaking; "to teach," as Maxine Greene (1996, p. 29) says, "in such a way as to arouse passion...;" to engage the very beings of our students; to encourage openness to new meanings and nuances beyond stereotypical classification — to nurture a transformation of thought from ethereal elitist notions of knowledge to substantive democratic actualities of understanding — to increase self-awareness and self-empowerment.

NOTES:

[1] Based on a private conversation with an NBC program director, June, 1996. (Person requested anonymity.) Figure represents maximum number of commercials (i.e. 15 second spots) during allotted non-prime time network television. Range would be from 22 to 33 per hour, depending on length of advertisement (i.e. 15, 30, 45, or 60 seconds) and time of day (prime-time shows have half as much commercial air time as others). Covert advertisements, such as camera close-ups of a sponsor's product used by an actress during a program, are not included.

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